



Michael Haering/Herald photographer

Daniel Furuya teaches aikido in a classic Japanese-style house crafted by master carpenter Shigeo Miura.

# A touch of Kyoto hidden in L.A.

*Traditional Japanese house built in downtown warehouse*

A traditional Japanese dwelling built by a master carpenter is hidden away in a section of the old Los Angeles Post Office Annex on Second Street east of Alameda in a run-down industrial district now popular with artists.

You step through a small doorway in a long brick wall off the loading platform of the old sorting office (940 E. Second St.) into another reality. In a space 40 feet square and 45 feet high is built a Japanese house of stained Douglas fir in the style of 17th century teahouses like the charming Shokin-tei in the garden of the Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto.

This house functions as a theater of the weaponless martial art aikido. Your barefoot host and

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## LEON WHITESON

### On Architecture

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aikido master is Dan Furuya, a stocky young Angeleno dressed in the baggy black pants and wrap-around white canvas top worn by practitioners of the Japanese martial arts. Furuya stands on a padded floor that covers most of the main level of the pavilion. To one side is the traditional alcove, or *tokonoma*, where faded photos of Morihei Ueshiba, founder of aikido in the early years of this century,

and of his son Kisshomaru, with whom Furuya studied in Japan, are displayed.

Hard L.A. light filters down from a partly glazed roof high above, softened by the dark-textures and innate serenity of Oriental architecture. A narrow and bare wooden stair leads to the second and third levels. The bare brick walls and exposed steel trusses of the basic structure intrude like rude noises at a tranquil tea ceremony.

On the second story is the kitchen, bathroom and study. A bedroom is fitted on a platform at the topmost level, under the sloping

# Aikido dojo shows strength, delicacy

Architecture/Continued from C-1

tin roof. Tatami (straw floor mats) and shoji (sliding screens of translucent paper) articulate the small yet spacious areas. A *butsudan* antique cabinet displays some cherished heirlooms. The Japanese genius for making the best use of minimal space counters any sense of being cramped.

Dan Furuya lives and teaches in this pavilion, which was built by his friend and neighbor the master carpenter and sculptor Shigeo Miura. Miura is a relic, one of the very few masters of traditional Japanese woodworking left in his homeland, or in the world. The meticulous craftsmanship you admire in this aikido dojo doesn't come cheap. Furuya spent \$75,000 to fit out his antique fantasy.

Born in Los Angeles, Furuya was educated in Japan and on the East Coast. He taught aikido in Hollywood from 1969 on, but "dreamed of my own place for 15 years." Furuya now teaches some 25 students the subtle arts of aikido early mornings and evenings Monday through Friday, and late mornings on the weekends, in his Japanese dojo.

Aikido means "the way to harmony with 'ki'" — the word "ki" has many shades of meaning, ranging from a sense of simple well-being to "the elemental basis of the universe." Ueshiba, its originator, was trained in the conventionally combative martial arts, but sought a "winless struggle" — not of opponents in opposition, but of collaborators striving together for a harmony in which "the true victory is conquering oneself."

A common instance of the character of aikido, which fuses calisthenics, judo, Zen meditation and swordless *kendo* postures, is that of the "unbendable arm." An

aikido adept extends his arm and challenges a partner to bend it. The limb looks relaxed, with unclenched fist, but it cannot be pushed down, even by a very strong man. The secret is that the unbendable arm is felt not as an isolated complex of muscles but as an open channel transmitting harmony from the lower abdomen out "to a distance of a thousand miles."

This discipline embodies that quintessentially Japanese interaction of brutality and delicacy, force and subtlety. Its intense calisthenics balance power with a control rooted in mind-body unity.

The same tensions operate in Japanese architecture, which greatly influenced the early American and European modernists, especially Frank Lloyd Wright. Using the simplest and most fragile of building materials and techniques — timber in a post-and-beam construction — traditional Japanese architecture created such masterpieces as the military Nijo Castle, the Diago-ji Temple, the Golden Pavilion or Kinkaku-ji. All of these architectures, no matter how daring and grand, suggest in their detailing the frailty of human artifacts in a region of earthquakes and tidal waves.

Westerners find it easier to imitate the gestures of Japanese style than to grasp its complex paradoxes. Frank Lloyd Wright incorporated Nipponese details into his vocabulary, for example, as well as some of its architecture's spatial fluencies — especially after designing Tokyo's Imperial Hotel in the early 1920s — but this "Japonaiserie" remained a superficial gloss on Wright's native American genius. Wright's assistant in Tokyo, Antonin Raymond, who

stayed on in Japan to learn and teach, achieved a much more profound — and now neglected — interpenetration of Western and Eastern modes in built form.

This cross-cultural interpenetration takes some startling forms, like Dan Furuya's teahouse-in-warehouse, a touch of Kyoto in L.A. For the young master's Angeleno pupils, working up a sweat before going to the office or escaping it, Morihei Ueshiba's revelation that "the martial arts are love!" is as exotically distant as the Heian Shrine.

In America, we look for techniques of self-improvement, for physical and spiritual "exercises." Our architecture, traditional and modern, is an act of will *against* nature. Japan, vulnerable to the elements, to a capricious sea, sky and unsteady earth, has sought to reconcile terror and tenderness in an "aikido" architecture that "fills us with the 'ki' of the universe and helps preserve the peace of the world."

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**DESIGN CALENDAR:** The West Adams Heritage Association offers its annual Open House Tour Nov. 4. The tour features Craftsman bungalows popular with wealthy Angelenos who favored this district in the 1920s and earlier. Contact Kathleen Salisbury, 737-7817.

Similarly, the Torrance Historical Society offers its Historic Homes and Buildings tour Saturday and Sunday. For information, call 328-5392.

The SCI-ARC Design Forum Public Lecture Series presents "Third World Architecture," beginning Wednesday with Guatemalan architect Efrain Recinos. Lecture starts at 8 p.m. in the SCI-ARC Auditorium, 1800 Berkeley St., Santa Monica.